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GENTLEMEN,

By Section 32 of the "Universities of Oxford and Cambridge Act, 1877" it is provided that the Commissioners appointed under that Act shall, in the case of any College in Oxford, give notice of any changes that they propose to make in the Statutes of the College, to the Visitor of the College which will be affected by such changes.

By the courtesy of the Oxford University Commissioners I have received a preliminary intimation, at an earlier date than the Act requires, and with a view of preparing me for the consideration of the official notice which I may expect to receive hereafter, under the provisions of that Section.

The proposed changes which have been communicated to me, and on which I should be thankful for your opinion, concern the relation of the Bishop of Lincoln to your College as successor and representative of its two Founders, occupants of the See of Lincoln in the 15th century, Bishop Fleming and Bishop Rotherham; and as Visitor of the College.

The Bishop of Lincoln has held the office of Visitor since its foundation. Even so lately as the year 1855, in page 7 of the Revised Code of the Statutes, approved

by the University Commissioners appointed by Parliament, are the following words declaring that the Bishop of Lincoln shall be perpetual Visitor of the College :—"Statuimus quod Episcopus Lincolnienſis, pro tempore exiſtens, Patronus Collegii noſtri et *Visitor exiſtat et nuncupetur in perpetuum.*"

Biſhop Fleming, Biſhop of Lincoln A.D. 1420–1431, one of the two Founders of Lincoln College, endowed it with the Rectorſhip and Seven Fellowſhips.

Biſhop Rotherham, the other Founder of the College, and Biſhop of Lincoln 1472–1480—endowed it with Five more Fellowſhips. The Venerable Edward Darby, Archdeacon of Stow, in the Dioceſe of Lincoln, founded Three more Fellowſhips in the College, A.D. 1536 ; and it was provided that the appointment to one of the Fellowſhips ſhould be veſted for ever in the Biſhop of Lincoln ; as the revised Code of the Statutes of 1855 expreſſes it (p. 4), "*e quibus unum per Dominum Episcopum Lincolnienſem in perpetuum nominari ſtatutum eſt.*"

Such are the provisions of the Statutes of Lincoln College with regard to the Visitor of the College, and to one of the Fellowſhips founded and endowed by two Biſhops of Lincoln and an Archdeacon of that Dioceſe.

I am now informed that it is propoſed to do two things—

(1) To remove the Bishop of Lincoln from the office of the Visitor of your College; and to confer that office on the Lord Chancellor.

(2) To deprive the Bishop of Lincoln of the right to appoint to the said Fellowship.

These alterations, I am told, are not intended to take effect while I occupy the See of Lincoln, but to come into operation at the next avoidance of it.

This, therefore, is not a personal question. Indeed, under no circumstances could I regard it as such.

I am also informed that these changes are in accordance with the wishes and recommendations of *three persons* who have been chosen by the Governing Body of your College, under clause 36 of the Universities Act of 1877, as "Commissioners to represent the College in relation to the making of Statutes for the College."

It is right that this should be known; because as the present Lord Chancellor is Chairman of the Oxford University Commission it might perhaps have been thought by some who do not know him, that Lord Selborne had exercised his influence as such to transfer the office of Visitor from the Bishop of Lincoln to himself.

I confess that I do not feel any satisfaction in hearing that the future destinies of our ancient and noble foundations, such as the Colleges of our two great Universities, are dependent, in a considerable degree, on opinions and feelings of *three individuals* in each College, who may be excellent men, but who,

as far as I know, are anonymous and irresponsible, and happen for the time being to be in favour with those who constitute "the Governing Body" for the time being, and who now, in the case of Lincoln College, are not more than *eleven persons*.

Everything of importance connected with these Institutions ought, I conceive, to be made publicly known before it is resolved upon, so that the members of them may not be taken by surprise, and not hear of it for the first time when it is too late to act.

It is for this reason that I address this letter to you.

I appeal from an unknown Triumvirate to all the Members of Lincoln College, who are deeply interested in its welfare, and have a right to be informed what changes in its constitution are now contemplated.

My regret is not diminished when I come to examine the only recommendations of the three Collegiate Commissioners which have been communicated to me, and which I have just specified, and to be told the reasons alleged in favour of those recommendations.

The office of Visitor to your College has been held by Bishops of Lincoln for more than four hundred years. It is now proposed that they should be deprived of it, and that it should be conferred on the Lord Chancellor.

If no great and certain good can be proved to be a consequence of such a transfer as this, then I venture to think that it ought not to be made.

It is equivalent to a censure on the Founders, who gave their benefactions on certain conditions, one of which was that their successor in the See of Lincoln should be Visitor; and it is tantamount to a condemnation of the practice of the College since its foundation.

To sever the connexion between Lincoln College and the See and Cathedral of Lincoln—a connexion prescribed and constituted by the Bishops of Lincoln to whom its foundation and endowments are due—and to snap asunder the chain of continuity which has existed for four hundred years, seems—I confess, to me, to be an act of reckless innovation, shewing a miserable lack of that spirit of gratitude, reverence, and affection, which is one of the noblest elements of our nature spiritualized by grace, and a deplorable absence of that imaginative faculty which dignifies humanity, and ennobles our English Institutions, by associating them with past ages, and with the memories of many centuries; and it appears to be characteristic of that puerile fickleness and feebleness and capricious love of change which is one of the surest signs of intellectual poverty and spiritual sterility, and one of the plainest tokens of national degeneracy and degradation.

I was therefore anxious to hear the causes which appeared to the three Representatives of your College to require and justify this innovation.

The reason assigned is this, that “the functions of Visitor being *chiefly judicial*, it is expedient that they

should be vested in a person having the qualifications which accompany high judicial office," such as the Lord Chancellor of England.

I have held the office of Visitor of Lincoln College and of two other Colleges, for nearly twelve years; and I do not hesitate to say that the office of a Visitor of a College is, *not* "chiefly judicial," but it is also ecclesiastical, and spiritual; and that to transfer that office from a Bishop to a Lay Functionary (who may perhaps, hereafter, be not a member of the Church of England, or even a believer in Christianity) will be found, when examined, to savour somewhat of the spirit of Erastianism, and perhaps not to be conducive to that, which constitutes the principal value of a College, its moral and religious character.

That the office of Visitor of your own College is Ecclesiastical and Spiritual is evident from the history of the Chapel in which you all have worshipped.

Your Chapel owes its existence to a Bishop of Lincoln, Dr. John Williams. It was consecrated on Thursday, Sept. 25, 1631, by a Commission from him to Dr. Richard Corbet, Bishop of Oxford, who made a public declaration in the inner quadrangle of your College, to the effect "that though Lincoln College is situated in the University and County of Oxford, yet it is notoriously recognized as belonging to the *ordinary Jurisdiction of the Bishops of Lincoln*, and that he, the Bishop of Oxford, has always been

anxious not to seem to invade the limits of their jurisdiction.”*

It is now proposed to transfer this Episcopal authority to the Lord Chancellor, the chairman of the Oxford Commission. I can hardly suppose that the Lord Chancellor himself will sanction such a proposal.

So recently as the years 1871 (in the 34 Vic., chap. 26, sect. 6) the Legislature acknowledged the power of the *Visitor* to authorize *religious services* in the Chapel of the Colleges where he is Visitor.

Consequently, as Visitor of three Colleges, I have exercised the Ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Spiritual Ordinary of those Colleges, with regard to the religious Services in their Chapels.

In the present year I have had several communications for this purpose with my much revered friend, the Provost of King’s College, Cambridge, of which, as Bishop of Lincoln, I am Visitor.

The preservation of this authority in Episcopal hands is, I conceive, a safeguard for the due order of those Services.

Some of you perhaps may be cognizant of a College where a dangerous and heretical alteration in the religious Services of the College Chapel—one which would have been injurious to the faith of the Undergraduates worshipping in it—was averted by the vigilance of the Episcopal Visitor of the College.

* “Etiam si dictum Collegium in Universitate et Comitatu Oxon. situm sit, tamen ad *ordinariam jurisdictionem Episcoporum Lincoln.* pertinere notorié dignoscitur.” Such were the Bishop of Oxford’s words.

When Bishop Colenso was at Oxford in 1874, and was invited to preach there, I exercised that authority by a monition to the effect that he was not to be allowed to preach in the Chapels of the Colleges of which I am Visitor.

In the year 1870 I was requested as Visitor by the Governing Body of your College to concur in a proposed *alteration* of the original Statutes of the College, confirmed in 1855 by Parliament, which provided that the *Rector* of the College should be in *Holy Orders*.

The reason which I then gave for *dissenting* from that proposal was as follows :—

“The Founders of your College designed that it should be a religious Society; and for the maintenance of its religious character, it is, I think, very important that the Head of the College should (as required by the Statutes) be qualified to preach the Word of God, and to administer the Holy Communion to those Students who are committed to his charge, and of whom he will have to give an account hereafter; and that he should thus be reminded of his own sacred duties towards them. And I should not be discharging my duty aright, as Visitor of the College, to its Founders and Benefactors, and to the College itself, and to those Parents who send their sons to be educated there, if I were to give my assent to a proposal which, in my judgement, would have a

manifest tendency to impair the character of the College as a place of Christian Education."

Subsequent reflexion has confirmed me in the opinions which I then expressed, and I should feel much regret if I had complied with that request, and had given my consent to that proposal.

However, in this matter, the Visitor of a College will be powerless for the future.

Whether the abolition of his functions in that respect will be good for the College, will be seen hereafter.

I am thankful to the Commissioners for affording me an opportunity of stating publicly my reasons against the removal of Bishops of Lincoln from the office of Visitor of the College founded and endowed by their predecessors

As to the Fellowship of which they are patrons, and of which it is proposed now to deprive them, that was assigned to them as a grateful and graceful recognition of the services rendered to the College by Bishops of Lincoln and an Archdeacon of the Diocese, in founding the College and endowing fifteen Fellowships in it. Such graceful gratitude for the generous actions of good men in past ages, appears to have little charms for the present times. I fear that the extinction of it will not encourage benefactions to our public institutions. The present age will not commend itself to the gratitude of posterity by ingratitude for the past.

Of this also I am sure, that, in making an appointment to that Fellowship, the Bishop of Lincoln would be guided exclusively by considerations of what would best promote the due reward of merit, and would be conducive to the welfare of the College, as a seminary of sound Learning and religious Education.

It is, I venture to think, of great importance that care should be taken, especially at the present time, to secure the personal presence and influence of men eminent for learning, piety, and holiness, as resident Fellows in our Colleges.

In our zeal for the advancement of secular Knowledge alone we are, I think, too prone to forget the national uses of our Colleges, as schools of Christian training for the service of the Church and Realm.

The future welfare of England depends mainly on the religious as well as the intellectual character and attainments of the rising generation, especially in the higher classes. And that character will derive its power for good or evil from the temper and tone of the Colleges in our Universities, as to Christian faith and morals, and Christian worship. The importance, therefore, of the present work of the University Commission under the Act of 1877 cannot be overated.

The future destinies of our Colleges and Universities, and of the English Nation as affected by them, are in their hands.

I have thought it incumbent on me, under a sense of a solemn responsibility, and in discharge of a sacred duty, to call your attention to two proposed changes—which have come to my knowledge, and concern your own College, by way of specimen—and to invite your attention to them, and a declaration of your own sentiments upon them.

Other important changes are now in contemplation, and deserve the careful consideration of all who are interested in the welfare of our ancient Colleges, and in the education of those who will exercise a powerful influence on the future weal of the Church and Nation.

Let me therefore express an earnest hope that they may receive that attention,—before it is too late.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your faithful Servant,

C. LINCOLN.



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